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Losing One's (Cartesian) Mind: A Problem With Descartes's Proof

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ABSTRACT

According to Descartes, the Meditations and Objections and Replies contain a logically sound proof that he has a Cartesian mind, along with a comprehensive explanation of that proof. A close look at these texts, however, reveals that things are not quite as sound and comprehensive as Descartes says they are. For the proof -- which is formally presented in the Sixth Meditation -- contains a dubious premise. When some of his objectors point this out, Descartes replies that the truth of the premise was firmly established in the Second Meditation. But this comes as a rather startling reply, since in the Second Meditation itself, and numerous other places, Descartes (quite correctly) *denies* that such a premise is ever established there. So, in spite of Descartes's attempt to locate a justification for it, the said premise remains unjustified and dubious.

In the pages that follow I try to present this criticism in more detail. In doing so I examine several parts of the Meditations. Descartes makes it fairly clear that the Sixth Meditation proof is not isolated from the rest of the Meditations, but rather is to a great extent motivated and driven by the material that precedes it. So, as well as examining the Sixth Meditation proof, I also examine the 'method of doubt' in the First Meditation, the *cogito ergo sum* and *sum res cogitans* passages in the Second Meditation, and the passages concerned with clear and distinct ideas and God in the Third, Fourth and Fifth Meditations. Once the import of these passages becomes clear, it becomes relatively easy to see the weakness in Descartes's proof that he has a Cartesian mind.

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1

CARTESIAN MINDS, CARTESIAN BODIES, AND SUBSTANCE DUALISM.

Scene:

A smoked-filled bar. Kevin, a Masters student, and Bevan, a first-year student, are seated in a corner booth, guzzling beer and talking philosophy. Copies of Descartes's Meditations and Objections and Replies lurk in Kevin's coat pocket.

1.1 The scope of this enquiry.

BEVAN: What's your thesis about?

KEVIN: I'm studying the argument Descartes gives in his Meditations on First Philosophy for the existence of his Cartesian mind. I'm afraid I don't find it very convincing.

BEVAN: I understand that Descartes discusses this issue in *several* of his works, not just the Meditations. Are you studying these other works too?

KEVIN: No. The way I see it, Descartes tries especially hard to do two things in the Meditations: (1) prove that he has a Cartesian mind (or, as he puts it, that his mind is distinct from his body); and (2) prove that God exists. That these two are his main goals is revealed very early on in the piece -- the subtitle of the Meditations reads, "in which are demonstrated the existence of God and the distinction between the human soul and the body".¹ So my feeling is that the Meditations is the place where Descartes gives the existence of his Cartesian mind (and God) his most careful attention. I mean, just listen to this extract from his Dedicatory Letter, which accompanied the copy of the Meditations that was presented to the Faculty of Theology in Paris:

¹ Cottingham, Stoothoff, and Murdoch, Vol. II (1984) -- hereafter, CSM II -- p. 12. Descartes also emphasizes that (1) and (2) are his main goals throughout the Dedicatory Letter (CSM II, pp. 3-6) and the Preface (CSM II, pp. 6-8).

What I have done [in the Meditations] is to take merely the principal and most important arguments and develop them in such a way that I would now venture to put them forward as very certain and evident demonstrations. I will add that these proofs are of such a kind that I reckon they leave no room for the possibility that the human mind will ever discover better ones. (CSM II, p. 4)

BEVAN: It sounds like Descartes is pretty confident he has sorted these matters out once and for all.

KEVIN: It does, doesn't it. In fact, prior to its publication Descartes went so far as to send copies of the Meditations out to various philosophers and theologians, asking these gentlemen to write back with any criticisms they had of it. Then, when he heard back from them, Descartes wrote replies to all the criticisms, and sent the whole lot off to be published alongside the Meditations, under the title Objections and Replies.

BEVAN: I presume he didn't think any of the criticisms were damaging.

KEVIN: No, not at all. Descartes doesn't concede an inch to his critics. In spite of this, however, the Objections and Replies is a useful companion to the Meditations, as it contains many explanations and clarifications of the issues that are presented there. So I haven't *quite* limited myself to the Meditations alone -- I've studied the Objections and Replies too. Actually, Descartes himself advises that the two should be studied together, in his Preface to the Meditations:

. . . I certainly do not promise to satisfy my [serious] readers straightaway on all points, and I am not so presumptuous as to believe that I am capable of foreseeing all the difficulties which anyone may find. So first of all, in the *Meditations*, I will set out the very thoughts which have enabled me, in my view, to arrive at a certain and evident knowledge of the truth, so that I can find out whether the same arguments which have convinced me will enable me to convince others. Next, I will reply to the objections of various men of outstanding intellect and scholarship who had these *Meditations* sent to them for scrutiny before they went to press. For the objections they raised were so many and so varied that I would venture to hope that it would be hard for anyone else to think of any point -- at least of any importance -- which these critics have not touched on. I therefore ask my readers not to pass judgement on the *Meditations* until they have been kind enough to read through all these objections and my replies to them. (CSM II, p. 8)

BEVAN: So you've been studying the Meditations and Objections and Replies, but none of Descartes's other works. Is that right?

KEVIN: Yes. According to Descartes, a comprehensive and convincing account of the existence of his Cartesian mind can be found in the Meditations and Objections and Replies alone. So I've been taking him at his word, and looking at just these two sets of writings.²

1.2 A Cartesian mind thinks.

BEVAN: What exactly is a Cartesian mind?

KEVIN: Throughout the Meditations and Objections and Replies, Descartes emphasizes three features of a Cartesian mind: (1) it *thinks*; (2) it is *not extended*; and (3) it is a *substance*. I'll run through these features separately for you, and flesh them out a little. Hopefully this will answer your question.

Before I start though, let me point out that Descartes never uses the phrase 'Cartesian mind' himself. Mostly he uses just 'mind'. That's a little

2 My tone in this section suggests that Descartes only gives one proof of the existence of his Cartesian mind in the Meditations. In actual fact, I think he gives *two*. However, I am only going to discuss the proof that occurs *early on* in the Sixth Meditation (CSM II, p. 54), not the one that occurs *late* in the Sixth Meditation (CSM II, p. 59). It is the former proof that the preceding Meditations are most obviously related to, and that receives all the attention in the Objections and Replies. Consequently, I consider this to be the more important of the two.

The proof that occurs late in the Sixth Meditation is the following:

... there is a great difference between the mind and the body, inasmuch as the body is by its very nature always divisible, while the mind is utterly indivisible. For when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am merely a thinking thing, I am unable to distinguish any parts within myself; I understand myself to be something quite single and complete. Although the whole mind seems to be united to the whole body, I recognize that if a foot or arm or any other part of the body is cut off, nothing has thereby been taken away from the mind. As for the faculties of willing, of understanding, of sensory perception and so on, these cannot be termed parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, and understands and has sensory perceptions. By contrast, there is no corporeal or extended thing that I can think of which in my thought I cannot easily divide into parts; and this very fact makes me understand that it is divisible. This one argument would be enough to show me that the mind is completely different from the body, even if I did not already know as much from other considerations. (CSM II, p. 59. "Other considerations" is a reference to the proof I am going to examine.)

Apart from a para-phrasing in the Synopsis, there is no further discussion of this proof. I too will refrain from discussing it, suffice to say that my criticism of Descartes's other proof can be leveled at this one also.

confusing though, since 'mind' means different things to different people. Some people think that to talk about minds is really to talk about *brains*, for example, and others think that to talk about minds is really to talk about *behaviour*. When *Descartes* talks about minds though, he's talking about something different again. So I'm going to use the phrase 'Cartesian mind' instead of 'mind', just so you don't forget that we're discussing *Descartes's* view of the 'mind' here, not yours or mine or anyone else's .

And one more thing. *Descartes* sometimes uses words *other* than 'mind' to refer to his Cartesian mind. Sometimes he uses 'soul', and sometimes 'I'. He makes it clear that these words are synonymous though, when he says things like,

... while the body can very easily perish, the mind < or the soul of man, for I make no distinction between them > is immortal by its very nature (Synopsis of the six following Meditations, CSM II, p. 10),

and,

... it is certain that I < that is, my soul, by which I am what I am > am really distinct from my body, and can exist without it. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54)³

So don't worry if I quote you passages where *Descartes* is talking about his *soul*, or *himself*, and I say they are passages about his *Cartesian mind*. It's not that I'm trying to pull a fast one on you, but rather that *Descartes* is just using some synonyms.

Now then, the first feature that *Descartes* emphasizes about a Cartesian mind is that it *thinks*, as the following passages demonstrate:

... I conceive of myself as a thing that *thinks* and is not extended
... (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

³ Phrases within diamond brackets are found in the French version of the Meditations (published in 1647), but not the Latin version (published in 1642). Although Cottingham's translation (Cottingham translated the Meditations and Objections and Replies alone) is based on the Latin version, he frequently inserts phrases from the French version, phrases which he feels "offer useful glosses on, or additions to, the original" Latin version (CSM II, p. 2). Whenever such a phrase occurs in a passage I quote, I will -- as Cottingham does -- place it in diamond brackets.

. . . the idea I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a *thinking* thing, which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

. . . I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a *thinking*, non-extended thing . . . (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

. . . understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the substance which is called *mind*. (4th Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: This last passage mentions 'understanding', 'willing' and 'doubting' rather than 'thinking'. Is it Descartes's view that thinking is composed of activities like those?

KEVIN: Yes, thinking is made up of those activities plus a few more. Descartes gives a slightly longer list in the Second Meditation, when he explains that a thing that thinks is a thing that

. . . doubts, understands, affirms, denies, is willing, is unwilling, and also imagines and has sensory perceptions. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 19)

And this explanation is repeated almost word for word at the beginning of the Third Meditation.⁴

BEVAN: It seems to me that, in saying a Cartesian mind thinks, Descartes has told us of the *tasks* a Cartesian mind performs -- it performs the tasks of doubting, of understanding, of affirming, of denying etc. etc.

KEVIN: That's a nice way of putting it. And Descartes has decided to use 'thinking' as a catch-all phrase for these psychological tasks. So, what does a Cartesian mind do? Answer: a Cartesian mind *thinks*.

BEVAN: But how helpful is it to describe a thing in terms of the tasks it performs? Does that tell you much about the thing itself? I mean, the 'Is it an animal, mineral, or vegetable?' type of question still remains unanswered, doesn't it. For example, if I say I've got a 'guard', and describe it as 'a thing that protects me', I don't really indicate what my guard looks

4 CSM II, p. 24.

like, or what it's made of etc. I've indicated what it *does*, but no one as yet can say it is or it isn't a legal guardian, a big brother, a bodyguard, a guard dog, a gun, a guardian angel, God, or any number of other things. The description I've given of my guard isn't specific enough to indicate one particular thing. It only indicates a set of things -- those things that can protect me.

KEVIN: You're quite right. Saying of a Cartesian mind that it thinks leaves it very much up in the air what a Cartesian mind *is* exactly. It could turn out to be any one of a number of things. Perhaps it's a ghostly spirit. Perhaps it's a sophisticated artificial device, like a computer. Maybe it's a human body. Maybe it's an alien that's sending out *signals* to a human body (just as a T.V. transmitter sends out signals to a T.V.).

You're actually not alone in seeing how 'un-revealing' it is to describe something as 'a thing that thinks'. Gassendi, the author of the Fifth Set of Objections, has this to say in response to Descartes's claims that he is 'a thing that thinks':

In saying that you are simply 'a thing that thinks' you mention an operation of which all of us were already well aware; but you tell us nothing of the substance which performs this operation -- what kind of substance it is, and what it consists of, how it organizes itself to perform so many different functions in so many different ways, and other matters of this kind . . . (CSM II, pp. 185-186)⁵

Personally, I think you and Gassendi have a valid point. Being told that a Cartesian mind thinks is of course better than being told nothing, but it doesn't really get us to the point where we can say, 'Oh, *now* I know what a Cartesian mind is.' We need *more* information for that.⁶

1.3 A Cartesian mind is not extended.

KEVIN (cont.): Fortunately, Descartes does provide more information. Another thing he says is that a Cartesian mind is *not extended*. Consider the

⁵ See also Gassendi's comments on pp. 192-193 of CSM II, which are similar in nature.

⁶ The reason why I have spent time in this section discussing how 'un-revealing' it is to say of a thing that it thinks is to introduce an idea that will be taken up in more detail from Chapter 5 onwards -- namely, Descartes's claim that he thinks does *not* by itself entail that he is unextended too.

following passages:

. . . I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is *not extended*
 . . . (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

. . . the idea I have of the human mind, in so far as it is a thinking thing, *which is not extended in length, breadth or height and has no other bodily characteristics*, is much more distinct than the idea of any corporeal thing. (Fourth Meditation, CSM II, p. 37, my emphasis)

. . . I have a clear and distinct idea of myself, in so far as I am simply a thinking, *non-extended* thing . . . (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

Even though the mind is united to the whole body, it does not follow that it is extended throughout the body, *since it is not in its nature to be extended*, but only to think. (Fifth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 266, my emphasis)

BEVAN: What does it mean to be 'not extended'?

KEVIN: Well, I guess a good way of finding out what being *not* extended amounts to is to first find out what being *extended* amounts to. And on this point Descartes is fairly clear: to be extended is to be a "corporeal" thing,⁷ a "material" thing,⁸ a "body".⁹ Something that is extended has a "determinable shape",¹⁰ a "definable location",¹¹ and a "size".¹² It occupies space "in such a way as to exclude any other body".¹³ And it is a "sensory" thing¹⁴ -- it is "perceived by touch, sight, hearing, taste

7 CSM II, p. 50ff.

8 CSM II, pp. 11 and 50.

9 CSM II, pp. 17 and 56.

10 CSM II, p. 17 (also pp. 14 and 30, where different phrasing is used to express the same idea).

11 CSM II, p. 17 (also pp. 14 and 30, where different phrasing is used to express the same idea).

12 CSM II, pp. 14 and 30.

13 CSM II, p. 17.

14 CSM II, p. 53.

or smell".¹⁵

BEVAN: So an extended thing is basically what I would call a 'physical object'. Stones and sheep and buildings and the like are extended things, but ghosts and angels and God and the like aren't.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right.

Now presumably, a Cartesian mind -- since it is not extended -- *lacks* all the features I've just listed. A Cartesian mind, then, is *not* a corporeal thing, a material thing, a body. It does *not* have a determinable shape, a definable location, or a size. It does *not* occupy space in such a way as to exclude any other body. And it is *not* perceived by the senses of touch, sight, hearing, taste or smell.

BEVAN: So Cartesian minds belong in that group made up of ghosts and angels and God and the like?

KEVIN: Yes. In fact, a phrase that has become fashionable for describing a Cartesian mind is 'the Ghost in the Machine'.¹⁶

1.4 A Cartesian mind is a substance.

KEVIN (cont.): The third feature that Descartes emphasizes about a Cartesian mind is that it is a *substance*:

. . . all the things that we clearly and distinctly conceive of as different *substances* (*as we do in the case of mind and body*) are in fact substances which are really distinct one from the other . . . (Synopsis, CSM II, p. 9, my emphasis)

. . . I think that a stone is a substance, or is a thing capable of existing independently, and I also think that *I am a substance*. Admittedly I conceive of myself as a thing that thinks and is not extended, whereas I conceive of the stone as a thing that is extended and does not think, so that the two conceptions differ enormously; but they seem to agree with respect to the classification 'substance'. (Third Meditation, CSM II, p. 30, my emphasis)

. . . understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the *substance which is called mind*. (Fourth Set of

¹⁵ CSM II, p. 17.

¹⁶ See Ryle (1949, pp. 15-16) for the coining of the phrase.

Replies, CSM II, p. 157, my emphasis)

This second quote here has the beginnings of an explanation as to what Descartes means by the term 'substance' -- a 'substance' is "a thing capable of existing independently". A slightly better explanation is given in the Fourth Set of Replies:

. . . the notion of a *substance* is just this -- that it can exist by itself, that is without the aid of any other substance. (CSM II, p. 159, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: So any particular substance, such as a Cartesian mind, is a complete, self-sufficient unit? It could exist even if nothing else did?

KEVIN: Well, not quite if *nothing* else did. For Descartes has this idea that all substances depend on *God* for their existence.¹⁷ But don't worry too much about this point. Just note that substances don't depend on anything *besides* God for their existence. Each substance that exists could do so even if no others did.

BEVAN: That would be a funny sort of world, wouldn't it -- one Cartesian mind, and nothing else?

KEVIN: Well yes, it does sound a bit bizarre. But I guess that once you accept there *are* substances, and that God creates them, it's not hard to imagine God creating just the one Cartesian mind. In fact, in the First and Second Meditations Descartes spends a lot of time discussing exactly that scenario.¹⁸

1.5 Substance dualism and Cartesian bodies.

KEVIN (cont.): Okay. There's a fairly brief outline of what a Cartesian mind is -- it's a non-extended thinking substance. Now, before I go on to tell you about Descartes's proof that he *has* one of these things, I think I should first paint you the wider picture, so to speak. If you are aware of Descartes's overall plan, I think you will better appreciate what he is trying to accomplish.

In arguing that he has a Cartesian mind, Descartes is advocating a

¹⁷ See CSM II, p. 10.

¹⁸ See Sections 2.6 (pp. 28-32), 3.5 (pp. 42-44) and 4.1 (pp. 45-47).

theory called 'substance dualism'. This is a theory about what kind of creatures you and I and our kind are. It maintains that we are each composed of two quite distinct parts, one of which is -- surprise, surprise -- a Cartesian mind.

BEVAN: What's the other part?

KEVIN: Descartes calls it a 'body'. (I'll call it a 'Cartesian body', because again Descartes has his own unique view as to what a 'body' is.)¹⁹ Basically, it's the antithesis of a Cartesian mind. It too is a substance, but instead of being a non-extended thinking substance, it's a *non-thinking extended* one. It's composed of a whole lot of flesh and bone bits and pieces -- arms, legs, torso, head, brain, and other internal organs. Descartes describes it thus:

. . . I propose to concentrate on what came into my thoughts spontaneously and quite naturally whenever I used to consider what I was. Well, the first thought to come to mind was that I had a face, hands, arms and the whole mechanical structure of limbs which can be seen in a corpse, and which I called the *body*. (Second Meditation, CSM II, p. 17, my emphasis)

. . . I have a distinct idea of body, in so far as this is simply an extended, non-thinking thing. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54)

. . . being extended and divisible and having shape etc. are forms or attributes by which I recognize the substance called *body* . . . (CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

BEVAN: In the first quote here Descartes likens a Cartesian body to what can be seen in a corpse. Does that mean he considers a Cartesian body to be a *lifeless* thing, like (say) a stone?

KEVIN: No, I don't think so. For in the Sixth Meditation he gives a description of a Cartesian body that is not 'connected up' to a Cartesian mind (which Cartesian bodies usually are), and this creature is very much alive:

. . . I might consider the body of a man as a kind of machine equipped with and made up of bones, nerves, muscles, veins, blood and skin in such a way that, even if there were no mind in

¹⁹ Descartes actually has two different meanings for the word 'body'. Sometimes he means 'corporeal thing' (see p. 7 above). Other times his meaning concerns a *particular* corporeal thing. It is this second use of the word 'body' that I am discussing here.

it, it would still perform all the same movements as it now does in those cases where movement is not under the control of the will or, consequently, of the mind < but occurs merely as a result of the disposition of the organs >. (CSM II, p. 58)

Descartes gives some examples of movements that occur "merely as a result of the disposition of the organs" in the Fourth Set of Replies:

. . . a very large number of the motions occurring inside us do not depend in any way on the mind. These include heartbeat, digestion, nutrition, respiration when we are asleep, and also such waking actions as walking, singing and the like, when these occur without the mind attending to them. When people take a fall, and stick out their hands so as to protect their head, it is not reason that instructs them to do this; it is simply that the sight of the impending fall reaches the brain and sends the animal spirits into the nerves in the manner necessary to produce this movement even without any mental volition, just as it would be produced in a machine. (CSM II, p. 161)

So a Cartesian body on its own is certainly not lifeless. But neither is it particularly versatile. I guess its behaviour would be fairly similar to that of a severely mentally-disabled adult.

BEVAN: In having arms and legs, a torso, a head, a brain and other internal organs, a Cartesian body is quite clearly an extended thing. That much I understand. But why is it also a *non-thinking* thing? If it has a brain and other internal organs, why can't it doubt, understand, affirm, deny etc.?

KEVIN: Well, the fundamental idea behind substance dualism is that no flesh and bone organs are *relevant* to being able to think. What's required for that is a *further* organ -- a Cartesian mind.²⁰ So a Cartesian body on its own is really just a funny sort of *machine*, as Descartes suggests in those last two quotes. In fact, in the Sixth Meditation quote Descartes is actually likening a Cartesian body to a *clock*. With a clock, says Descartes, you have particular parts combined in a particular way, and the resulting movements of those parts are limited in range and (of course) machine-like. Similarly, reasons Descartes, with a Cartesian body on its own you have

²⁰ I personally find the description of a Cartesian mind as an 'organ' extremely helpful. It seems to disperse (if only for a moment) some of the murkiness surrounding the notion of a 'non-extended thinking substance', and bring everything down to a more manageable level. I stole the description from Ryle (1949, p. 168).

particular parts combined in a particular way, and the resulting movements of those parts are limited in range and machine-like. Those movements, he suggests, are the unthinking/instinctive/reflex movements that he and you and I exhibit -- breathing, going to sleep, recoiling from heat, crying out when the stomach is empty or the skin is pierced, perspiring when hot, emitting water from the eyes when around onions, reaching out when falling, stuff like that. *Non-reflexive* movements, such as buying clothes, preparing food, driving cars, doing crosswords, conversing with people etc., just don't fall within the range of movements that a Cartesian body on its own could perform.²¹

BEVAN: So what's going on 'upstairs', or 'in the head of', a Cartesian body on its own?

KEVIN: Nothing at all. Again, think in terms of machines. Try plants and animals too. Just ask yourself how much is going on 'upstairs' when (say) a Venus Fly Trap closes its leaves around a fly, or when a dog twitches its leg when you scratch the right spot, or when a clock keeps time, or when a mechanical arm does some soldering on a car assembly line.

BEVAN: I don't suppose there's *anything* going on 'upstairs' in these cases.

KEVIN: That's right. And that's how it would be with a Cartesian body too. There would be nothing going on 'upstairs', ever. A Cartesian body on its own would be a complete 'airhead'.

BEVAN: This lack of thought -- it wouldn't be due (say) to a lack of training, or to a deformity, or to anything like that, would it?

KEVIN: No. A Cartesian body -- even a mature healthy one -- just wouldn't be capable of having thoughts. It wouldn't have the right design for it, just as (say) a *clock* doesn't have the right design for having thoughts.

BEVAN: Hmm. So having a brain and other internal organs isn't going to help a Cartesian body to think one bit. For according to substance

21 That a Cartesian body on its own would be limited in its behaviour patterns is a point that has nearly always been missed, I think. And this has resulted in substance dualism receiving some rather bad press. For the mistaken view that a Cartesian body on its own would behave just like a Cartesian body-*plus-mind* generates various difficulties, the most notable of which is the 'problem of other minds'. This problem highlights how difficult it would be to detect other Cartesian minds, if Cartesian bodies on their own not only looked but also *acted* just like Cartesian bodies-plus-minds.

Once it is made clear, though, that Cartesian bodies on their own would be *limited* in their behaviour patterns, it becomes very easy to detect other Cartesian minds. Just look for Cartesian bodies that are *versatile* in their behaviour patterns; ones that act like that are obviously connected up to Cartesian minds.

dualism, thinking is an activity performed solely by Cartesian minds. Brains and the like don't feature in it at all. You could find a brain as big as a house, but you wouldn't get an ounce of thought out of it. No Cartesian mind means no thinking.

KEVIN: Correct.

Incidentally, this is exactly why Descartes often uses the expression 'My mind is distinct from my body' (or something similar) when claiming he has a Cartesian mind.²² The point he's making is that the organ responsible for his thinking is not one of his *extended* organs. It's not his brain, nor any other part of his body. It's an organ which *lacks* extension -- a Cartesian mind.

1.6 The 'separateness' and 'togetherness' of a united Cartesian mind and body.

KEVIN (cont.): Right, let's continue with substance dualism. According to the theory, you and I are made up of two distinct parts: a Cartesian mind -- a non-extended thinking substance; and a Cartesian body -- a non-thinking extended substance. Now, since these two parts are *substances*, each could exist even if the other didn't. So that the two just happen to exist side by side in you and I doesn't detract at all from their 'separateness'. This point is made quite clearly by Descartes a number of times:

. . . I < that is, my soul, by which I am what I am > am really distinct from my body, *and can exist without it*. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 54, my emphasis)

. . . the mind and the body are incomplete substances when they are referred to a human being which together they make up. But if they are considered on their own, they are complete.

For just as being extended and divisible and having shape etc. are forms or attributes by which I recognize the substance called *body*, so understanding, willing, doubting etc. are forms by which I recognize the substance which is called *mind*. And I understand a thinking substance to be just as much a complete thing as an extended substance. (Fourth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 157, Descartes's emphasis)

²² I mentioned earlier (p. 1 above) that Descartes often expresses the matter this way. As you will see in Section 7.1 (pp. 87-90), it is more or less this expression that Descartes employs in his Cartesian mind proof.

. . . the notions of a thinking thing and an extended or mobile thing are completely different, and independent of each other. . . . [H]owever often we find them in one and the same subject -- e.g. when we find thought and corporeal motion in the same man -- we should not think that they are therefore one and the same in virtue of a unity of nature, but should regard them as the same only in respect of unity of composition. (Sixth Set of Replies, CSM II, p. 287)

BEVAN: I see from these last two quotes that there is something of a 'flip-side' to the 'separateness' of a Cartesian mind and body: in spite of their being so different, and so complete in themselves, they still manage to come together somehow to form a union, which Descartes calls a 'man'.

KEVIN: Oh yes, Descartes emphasizes this 'togetherness' just as much as he does their 'separateness'. The Sixth Meditation is full of claims to that effect. When discussing his sensory perceptions of the objects around him, for example, Descartes says things like,

. . . the fact that some of the perceptions are agreeable to me while others are disagreeable makes it quite certain that my body, or rather my whole self, *in so far as I am a combination of body and mind*, can be affected by the various beneficial or harmful bodies which surround it (CSM II, p. 56, my emphasis),

and,

My sole concern here is with what God has bestowed on me as a combination of mind and body. (CSM II, p. 57)

These indicate that Descartes considers himself to be a walking, talking, breathing example of a united Cartesian mind and Cartesian body.

BEVAN: Does Descartes say much about the *nature* of this union?

KEVIN: Well, one thing he says is that it's a very close, very intimate, union. He tries to indicate the degree of intimacy by saying it's *not* like the union of a sailor to his ship:

Nature also teaches me, by these sensations of pain, hunger, thirst and so on, that I am not merely present in my body as a sailor is present in a ship, but that I am very closely joined and, as it were, intermingled with it, so that I and the body form a unit. If this were not so, I, who am nothing but a thinking thing, would not feel pain when the body was hurt, but would perceive the damage purely by the intellect, just as a sailor perceives by sight if

anything in his ship is broken. (Sixth Meditation, CSM II, p. 56)

The overall impression I get from the phrases he uses here -- "closely joined", "intermingled", "form a unit" -- and elsewhere -- "a kind of unit",²³ "combination",²⁴ "composite",²⁵ "united"²⁶ -- is that this union isn't any sort of loose affiliation. When a Cartesian body and a Cartesian mind are united, they are as thick as thieves, so to speak.

Unfortunately though, Descartes doesn't say *how* they unite. He just says they *do*. But how a ghostly thing could ever connect up with a physical thing is really something of a mystery. And he doesn't say much about *where* they unite either. He suggests the brain, or perhaps a small part of it,²⁷ but again this is all a bit of a mystery. Indeed, the issues of how and where a Cartesian mind and body unite are considered to be major problems with substance dualism. But don't worry yourself over these issues. Descartes first has to prove that a Cartesian mind *exists* before he can claim it unites with anything. And I think he's got his work cut out just doing this first job.

BEVAN: Well, now that I've got the wider picture, I'm very keen to see if Descartes *can* do this first job. For I guess that if I want to believe in any sort of 'life after death', I have to believe there's a part of me that is something like a Cartesian mind -- a part that is the source of my consciousness, and can survive the death of my physical body.

KEVIN: Yes, that's right. Descartes mentions several times that one of his main aims in proving he has a Cartesian mind is to show that "the decay of the body does not imply the destruction of the mind", which is "enough to give mortals the hope of an after-life" (Synopsis, CSM II, p. 10).²⁸

Right then, let's get down to business. I think it will be a good idea if I start you off at the beginning of the Meditations, and take you through the issues that lead up to the proof. The proof itself is fairly brief, but it draws

²³ CSM II, p. 11.

²⁴ CSM II, pp. 56, 57, 61.

²⁵ CSM II, pp. 57 and 59.

²⁶ CSM II, p. 59.

²⁷ CSM II, p. 59.

²⁸ See also CSM II, p. 3, where the same sentiments are expressed.

quite heavily on the preceding discussion. So you need to find out exactly where Descartes is coming from, and what the technical terms he uses in his proof mean, and so on. How does that sound?

BEVAN: Sounds fine. . . . Just before we get going though, there's something I'd like to ask you.

KEVIN: What's that?

BEVAN: Will you get me another beer?